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ABSTRACT

Noting that maturation, biological reading potential, and a number of parenting strategies can help young children become eager, competent readers, this paper lists the strategies two parents used to facilitate their daughter's reading competence. Thirty strategies are listed, each one accompanied by the appropriate learning principle. Included among the strategies are: encouraging the child to read to a younger sibling (prompting), and telling the child that the parents spend much of their work days reading (symbolic modeling). The paper also includes child-to-child suggestions for increasing reading and a question-and-answer section about increasing a child's reading. (KB)

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Using Psychological Strategies to Help Your Child Read More

ED 438 066

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I. Introduction

In mid 1998, when our daughter, Christine, turned six years old, she struggled to read books. We knew six-years-olds who read easily, but Christine did not, and we felt worried.

Christine kept trying, and we continued to do everything we could think of to facilitate her reading. Christine gradually read more and more. Before her seventh birthday, she started reading over 100 books a month. She continued to read at that rate month after month, during both the school year and the summer, even though she progressively tackled longer books. At the start of the year 2000, we stopped counting the books she read, as she moved up to "Harry Potter" length books (over 300 pages).

Can your child also read a hundred books a month? Maturation, biological reading potential, and a number of parenting strategies helped Christine develop into an eager, competent reader. We can't offer anything to help your child mature faster or add biological ability, but we can describe the strategies my wife and I used to facilitate Christine's reading. Many of these strategies are specific applications of principles we teach in a Behavior Modification class for college students. See Martin & Pear (1999) and Bandura (1986) for more information about principles of learning.

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If you use all these strategies, will your children read a hundred books a month? Some children will, and some won't, depending on age, biological ability, types of books selected, etc. However, without these strategies virtually no children will read that much. The primary mission of parents is to help their children develop to their full potential, and these strategies as a group can help parents do that.

After listing the strategies we used, we will include Christine's child-to-child suggestions for increasing reading, answers to questions you might have about increasing your child's reading, references, and author information.

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II. Parenting Strategies Used to Help Christine Enjoy Reading and Read a Great Deal (With the Principle of Learning Theory Involved)

We:

1. Read to her often starting when she was an infant. (Modeling & classical conditioning by pairing reading and pleasant interaction with parent)
2. Read to her every night when she went to bed, even on vacation. (Modeling & classical conditioning)
3. Read often in front of her and made positive remarks about what read. (Modeling & vicarious reinforcement)
4. Read different books to her each day when she was young, averaging over 20 new books a week. (Modeling)
5. Posted the letters of the alphabet in her bedroom. (Instruction)
6. Encouraged her to read more books in one year than either parent ever had. (Goal setting)
7. Had a small party whenever she read 10 books and then later whenever she read 100 books. (Reinforcement/rewarding and weaning off artificial elements of reinforcement
8. Praised her for reading and pointed out benefits she will experience as a result of reading a great deal, e.g., learning a great deal, doing well in school, having many career options, and leading many lives through the stories. (Reinforcement/reward)
9. Recorded the name of every book she read and kept a count. (Feedback on progress)
10. Encouraged her to watch Sesame Street. (Instruction)
11. Set a limit of 1 and ½ hours of TV per day, with only one hour allowed on a school day. (Eliminating reinforcement for competing, less desirable behaviors)
12. Participated each year in "No TV Week" -- see http://www.tvfa.org/mrltv.html. (Eliminating reinforcement for competing, less desirable behaviors)
13. Rarely watched TV ourselves. (Modeling)
14. Took her to the library two times or so every week to check out books and to attend library events for children. (Choosing environments with positive models)
15. Entered her each year in a summer reading program for kids. (Reinforcement/reward)
16. Provided her with a new book to read when we took a road trip of over 10 minutes. (Prompting and maximizing opportunities for reading to occur)
17. Took new books along for her to read when flew somewhere. (Prompting & maximizing opportunities for reading to occur)
18. Continued to read to her at times even after she started reading herself. At that point we read books to her that were too difficult for her to read herself. (Instruction, classical conditioning, modeling)
19. Encouraged her to read just about everything written that encountered, including road signs, newspaper cartoons, and letters. (Prompting)
20. Encouraged her to read to her younger brother. (Prompting)
21. Told her that reading well would help her enjoy many choices for a career. (Stating a rule of what behavior leads to what consequences in ordinary life)
22. Told her that we spend much of our work day reading. (Symbolic modeling)
23. Bought or borrowed age-appropriate computer games intended to facilitate reading. (Instruction & reinforcement/reward)
24. Corrected her mis-reading and mis-pronunciations when she read to us, but only for important words. (Prompting & avoiding punishing)
25. Chose books for her to read that had fewer than five words per page that she could not read correctly. (Behavior trapping, i.e., increasing a behavior that is naturally reinforced by the joy of successfully reading)

26. Showed her how to find books in the library that interest her and that are within her reading ability. (Instruction & weaning of assistance)
27. Helped her obtain a library card of her own as soon as she could print her first name. (Reinforcement & weaning of assistance)
28. Bought her many books. (Prompting)
29. Showed interest in the books she read, for instance by asking her about the moral of the story. (Reinforcement/reward)
30. Subscribed to age-appropriate magazines for her, such as Sesame Street© and Barney© . (Prompting)

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III. Child-to-Child Suggestions for Increasing Reading

Hi! 1. Make a goal and increase it. 2. Bring books in the car and a flashlight. 3. Put books in the bathroom, in the dining room and in other rooms. 4. Make a limit on a school day of an hour of TV. 5. Get books that are just right for you. Bye. Christine.

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IV. Questions and Answers About Increasing a Child's Reading

1. What is a reasonable goal for number of books read in a week or month?

Answer: A good initial goal is slightly more than the child is reading now. So a reasonable goal for a child who hasn't read a book in the past week might be one book per week or one book read at any time. You and your child can gradually increase the goal. Setting a goal that is unrealistically high will not facilitate reading. Christine, my wife, and I never set a goal of 100 books a month until **after** Christine had read at that level for a few months.

2. How much time does a parent need to spend to use these strategies?

Answer: We spend on average an hour a day taking Christine to the library, finding books for her, listening to her read, reading to her, or talking with her about the books she reads. Note that many of the strategies we used take very little time on a daily basis.

3. Which books are best?

Answer: The ones your child likes the most. Try to find authors or types of books your child likes. Ask librarians or booksellers for award-winning, best selling, or highly recommended children's books or see http://www.ala.org/parents.

4. Can a child read too much?

Answer: It's possible, but we have never seen that happen. Reading for 30-90 minutes a day on average will benefit virtually any child. However, other activities also can benefit children, including playing, sleeping, engaging in arts and crafts, etc.

5. Which strategies are most effective for increasing the amount a child reads?

Answer: The strategies listed herein all seemed to have value in facilitating Christine's reading. It's hard to tell which ones helped the most. Choose whichever ones you think are most feasible and most likely to be effective with your child. Develop and try your own strategies. If they seem to work, let us know. We can all learn from each other.

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